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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 CAIRO 002475

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [MASS](#) [MOPS](#) [KMFO](#) [EG](#) [IR](#) [IS](#) [KNNP](#) [KPAL](#)

SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR A/S HILLEN'S VISIT TO CAIRO

Classified by DCM Stuart Jones for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

Summary

11. (C) Embassy Cairo warmly welcomes your visit and the opportunity to discuss security assistance, border security, regional cooperation, and the MFO with the GOE. The Defense and Foreign Ministers will likely press you for further assurance of the Administration's support for the current level of security assistance. Defense Ministry officials will also seek your support to resolve the International Medical Center matter and may ask about the U.S commitment to maintaining troop levels at MFO. Given recent security incidents in the Sinai, officials may ask about the availability of U.S. assistance to bolster security on the Egypt-Gaza border. End summary.

Security in the Sinai

12. (C) Security along Egypt's border with Gaza and in the Sinai in general remains a key concern. The April 24 bombings in the resort town of Dahab and the suicide attacks on April 26 represent the third and fourth terrorist incidents in the Sinai in a year and a half. Poor education and employment opportunities, arbitrary law enforcement, and half-hearted development efforts conspired to give the Bedouin few alternatives to their traditional pursuit of smuggling. This, in turn, has made them vulnerable to exploitation by terrorists. Developments in the occupied territories, and particularly in Gaza, also complicate Sinai security and have, on occasion, led to breaches in border security.

13. (C) The deployment of 750 members of the Border Guard Forces (BGF) has improved smuggling interdiction significantly and allowed the GOE to control incidents such as the break through of the border wall caused by the Al Aksa Martyrs Brigade on January 4. However, the BGF are poorly equipped, poorly trained and stretched thin. In light of these gaps, the MoD asked the USG for a supplemental budget of USD 300 million to fund BGF equipment needs, ranging from helicopters and patrol boats to alarm wire, tunnel detectors, and bullet proof vests. We ignored the request due to the cost of new procurement and also because the Treaty of Peace restricts the technical equipment that can be placed in the Sinai. Defense Minister Tantawi has told GOI officials that Egypt would like to place as many as 4,000 Border Guards on the border. Although publicly satisfied with Egyptian border security (and with counter smuggling efforts in particular), GOI officials have said they are not yet ready to discuss allowing more BGF in the Sinai. You may want to ask MoD officials if there has been any progress on this issue.

14. (C) Given the potential impact of Sinai's security challenges on regional security, there are obvious advantages to bolstering USG support for GOE efforts to improve security. Possible opportunities for USG-GOE cooperation include:

-- providing training (possibly drawing, in part, on Export Control and Border Security program funds) to BGF and law enforcement officials (Note: topics could include counter-smuggling, border patrol, WMD handling, crisis response, and crowd control. End note.);

-- urging the GOE to use some FMF to fund Sinai-specific needs (as permitted by the Treaty of Peace); and

-- urging the GOE to make Sinai development a priority so that USAID resources could be directed to Sinai projects on the rule of law, education, and health.

15. (C) Each area of potential cooperation involves political and legal sensitivities stemming from the GOE's own views of the status of the Sinai (as compared with other regions of Egypt) and the fact that Sinai is administered as a military zone. Consequently, progress will require a new level of GOE buy-in. The 2006 visits of S/CT Ambassador Crumpton and ISN A/S Rademaker piqued GOE interest in furthering cooperation. In particular, Ambassador Crumpton suggested to GOE interlocutors that State would explore

initiatives to support border security and A/S Rademaker briefed GOE officials on training and other opportunities available under the Export Control and Border Security Program. Furthermore, some political leaders are clearly looking for solutions for Sinai and are tired of the old way of doing business there.

MFO

16. (C) The U.S. commitment to maintaining troop levels at MFO is an issue of increasing concern among GOE officials. Defense Secretary Rumsfeld's query to Defense Minister Tantawi on the MFO raised a red flag for the Egyptians. Consequently, on several occasions since that visit, Tantawi has sought reassurance of U.S. support for maintaining the status quo, arguing that the MFO would not have the same influence regionally without a strong U.S. troop presence and that Palestinian-Israeli developments argue against any change in troop levels. MoD officials would welcome any reassurance you can offer on this issue. You will have a change to review the status of the MFO in your meeting with the MFO's DG Representative.

Military Assistance

17. (C) President Mubarak regards the USD 1.3 billion in military assistance to Egypt as the keystone of the U.S.-Egyptian strategic relationship, but suggested recently in both a TV interview and in a meeting with Senator Shelby that he was prepared for an eventual reduction in assistance. That said, because of Egypt's support for U.S. regional objectives, such as on Iran, the Peace Process, Hamas, counterproliferation, and Sudan, the GOE believes that Congressional discussions about reducing or redirecting any portion of this assistance are inappropriate. GOE officials have said that any change would signal a downgrade in the relationship and may impact cooperation in key areas. These officials have also said that, on a practical level, reducing military assistance would force them to look elsewhere (i.e., Russia and China) for less expensive military equipment. We have advised the GOE that they bear responsibility for convincing Congress of Egypt's value to the U.S., but the GOE believes the U.S. should press Congress harder to ensure continued FMF support for Egypt. NEA A/S Welch recently suggested to Tantawi that Egypt send troops to support a UN mission in Darfur, and Tantawi promised to raise the matter with Mubarak. Tantawi then told visiting Senator Shelby, however, that further support for the AU mission was preferable to UN involvement. While Tantawi is not the lead on this foreign policy issue and his role is limited to supplying troops, you should press on the need for a strong effective force to ameliorate the humanitarian crisis in the Sudan.

Counterproliferation

18. (C) Under Secretary Joseph urged the Defense and Foreign Ministers to endorse the PSI's statement of the Principles of Interdiction during his April 12-14 visit. While FM Aboul Gheit pressed his staff (in Joseph's presence) to look at the issue and report back to him, Tantawi told the Ambassador directly (just before U/S Joseph's visit) that he prefers the present arrangement by which the GOE supports (quietly) U.S. counterproliferation requests, including interdictions, on a case by case basis.

Domestic Politics

19. (C) President Mubarak told Egyptian newspaper editors that his January meeting with Vice President Cheney and his February meeting with Secretary Rice indicated that the USG was satisfied with Egypt's reform process. This is not the case. The GOE is proceeding with its economic reform agenda, centered on an ambitious plan to create 4.5 million jobs over the next six years, but few concrete results on political reform have been observed thus far. The parliamentary elections in 2005 went badly, and postponement of local council elections until 2008 suggests that the GOE leadership is moving cautiously. The February 3 Red Sea ferry accident and the avian influenza crisis (12 human cases thus far) have also put the GOE somewhat on the defensive. The opposition bloc in the new Parliament, which includes 88 independent deputies affiliated with the banned but tolerated Muslim Brotherhood, has kept up a steady stream of criticism of the GOE. Secular opposition activist Ayman Nour, who placed a distant second to Mubarak in the September 2005 presidential elections, remains in prison after his December 24, 2005 conviction on politically-motivated forgery charges. Nour's

appeal before Egypt's highest court will be heard on May 18. Particularly in the wake of the Dahab attacks, both Aboul Gheit and Tantawi will tell you that internal reform is underway, but that security is of paramount importance.
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